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# Congress of the United States

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### New GAO Report Finds that Air Filtration at the Postal Service Needs Further Study Before National Deployment

A new GAO report released today by Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Rep. Danny K. Davis raises key questions about the cost and effectiveness of air filtration systems at the Postal Service. In response to the anthrax attacks last fall, the Postal Service developed plans to install high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration systems at its processing and distribution centers with the goals of reducing the risk of exposure to biohazards and preventing cross-contamination of the mail.

"This report raises important issues about the air filtration system, which need to be addressed," said Rep. Waxman. "It underscores the need to do more to ensure that the mail is safe for both postal workers and customers across the country."

Rep. Davis said, "The GAO report highlights additional steps necessary to protect our postal system. The Postal Service must continue with actions to address the GAO's concerns. Both the USPS Inspector General and the GAO have raised concerns over postal equipment used to detect biohazards in the mail. We want to ensure that the most appropriate and cost effective action is taken to protect postal employees and customers."

After examining prototype HEPA filtration machines installed at two postal processing centers, interviewing postal workers, and consulting with industry experts, GAO found:

- The Postal Service has not yet conducted tests to determine whether the machines will meet their intended purpose of capturing anthrax spores in a mail processing environment.
- The Postal Service has not determined whether the filtration equipment conflicts with plans to detect biohazards in the mail supply.
- The Postal Service has not analyzed how much power is needed to run filtration equipment, despite concerns by some postal employees that the requirements could cause outages.

- The Postal Service's budget estimates of air filtration do not account for several important factors and likely underestimate the true cost of the machines. Because the benefits are not known, nationwide deployment is not justified at the present time.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman is the ranking Democrat on the Government Reform Committee, and Rep. Danny K. Davis is the ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on Civil Service of the Government Reform Committee. The full report is available at the website of the minority office of the Committee on Government Reform: [www.reform.house.gov/min](http://www.reform.house.gov/min)